

DARKEST RUSSIA

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CHAPTER XVIII.—Continued.

Caroline was silent.

"It is a brave thought," at length she said. "But how are they to escape from the prison? The gates are closed."

"My husband will withdraw the guards there. They will be stationed in yonder room. The prisoners will come here to capture the house and will fall into the trap. Dare you do your part to aid in the escape of the man who saved your life at the risk of his own?" and Katherine fixed her eyes on the face of Caroline.

"Give me a moment alone—give me time to think," she said.

"I will await your answer," said Katherine eagerly. "It is, remember, to the effect the rescue of the young exile who snatched you from the jaws of death."

So saying, Katherine left the room.

The girl rose to her feet. Her heaving bosom showed that she was under some intense strain. She walked up and down the room once or twice, her hands pressed to her throbbing temples. At the upper end of the room was a stack of arms. She cautiously approached it and examined the guns. They were of the old-fashioned percussion cap type. Taking the decanter of vodka which stood near, she gazed curiously around for a moment and then poured the liquor down the barrels of the guns. Just as she had finished this extraordinary act there was a sound at the outer door, and Karsicheff and Nicholas re-entered the room.

They looked curiously at the girl.

"The lady has gone," explained Caroline, "but she will return presently."

"All right," said Nicholas, "we were afraid we might have interrupted your conversation."

At this moment the courier's door opened slightly. "Are you there, commandant?" he inquired.

"Yes," shortly answered Karsicheff.

"Those pardons for Alexis Nazimoff and Ivan Barosky are not to be forwarded to Chitka until I see you in the morning. I have other papers to send with them to the ispavnik at Chitka."

"Your orders will be obeyed."

"Very well," and the courier closed his door.

"You had better get the pardons



"GIVE THEM TO ME, I SAY!"

from mother," said Nicholas, in case he asks for them."

"There is plenty of time. She has them in her bosom and to ask her for them now would excite her still more. How has she succeeded, I wonder," and he looked at Caroline.

She had sunk into the chair, her head supported by her hand and her regular, heavy breathing showed that she was fast asleep. Karsicheff shrugged his shoulders. "Not a very promising instrument," he muttered.

Katherine came in at this moment,

and her eye fell on the sleeping girl. She advanced with a soft step. "Why did you come in," she said with some annoyance. "I have got her almost to the verge of consent," and in a rapid whisper she went over the details of the plan she had proposed to Caroline.

Karsicheff's eyes sparkled. "Excellent," he said.

Nicholas was doubtful. "She has not the nerve to carry it out."

"Leave me—we shall see. Go and instruct the guard to give her free entrance to the kamera, and to leave the gate open if you should desire. Then get your guards ready. If I can bring her to nerve herself to act all will go well and Alexis Nazimoff and Ivan Barosky will trouble us no more," and Katherine Karsicheff fairly gloated over the prospect.

"There must be no mistake," said Nicholas. "I will get a convict's suit and go into the kameras where I can overhear and see what she does."

"Splendid—an admirable idea. Go at once," said his mother.

The two men left the room.

"Now for it," said Katherine, as she placed her hand on the shoulder of the sleeping girl.

Caroline opened her eyes and with a start gazed around. "Pardon me, I—"

"You are fatigued," kindly said Katherine. "Perhaps, after all, what I suggested was too much for your strength, and we must abandon the poor fellow to his fate."

"No, I will try to do as you desire, madame."

"Brave, noble girl, you will not fail, and we shall have the happiness of seeing your preserver on the road to freedom."

"May God grant it," was the fervent response. "And now, madame, give me the file and an opportunity to get into the prison pen."

"Let the signal be a pistol shot," said Katherine, with feverish haste. "Here is a file; my husband has given orders to admit you to the kameras. Do not falter. Keep a brave heart, and all will be well."

"Do not fear, madame. My success shall surprise you"; and so saying, Caroline quitted the room.

"Victory—revenge—oh, my plan is perfect," said the now exultant Katherine, as she went to the door and watched the girl enter the stockade. A moment later she saw a figure slink along in the darkness. It was Nicholas and he was following Caroline.

Even as she saw him disappear, Karsicheff approached, the guard following him from the guardhouse. Silently they entered the house and taking their arms from the rack were conducted behind a door opposite to that which the convicts were to enter.

Katherine gave a signal for profound silence as Karsicheff disappeared with his men.

Then, drawing a revolver from her bosom, she examined it carefully and replaced it ready for use.

All was going well—everything was perfect, all but the pardon of Ilda Barosky, and that was in possession of the courier. She stepped to his door on tiptoe.

But not softly enough. "Who goes there!" said a gruff voice.

"The wife of the commandant, colonel. I was anxious about your injuries. Can I do anything for your comfort?"

"Thank you, no. I simply need rest."

Katherine stepped back. "He is wide awake. The pardon can not be stolen while he sleeps." Then a thought occurred to her and she smiled. Evidently a happy thought. It was this: If Caroline could succeed in the one task, why not try to make her attempt the other.

Every minute seemed an hour as

Katherine, her heart beating with anxious throbs, waited the return of the girl. She peered out into the night, trying to pierce the gloom. It was not long until her patience was rewarded. With a light step and with an air that spoke of success, Caroline appeared on the outside of the stockade, ran across, and entered the house.

"Have you succeeded," asked Katherine, eagerly.

"Better, madame, than I had dared to hope."

"They will attempt to storm the house."

"They are getting ready now."

"Brave girl. Oh, had I now but possession of the pardon of Ilda Barosky, by triumph would be complete."

"Ilda Barosky," said Caroline, "an absent friend?"

"No," responded Katherine, "she is my bitterest enemy, and in three days she will be free. The courier lies asleep in that room with her pardon in his possession. Could you but secure that pardon I would give you any reward you could ask in my power."

"He is asleep, you say?" asked Caroline.

"Yes, I think so. Will you try?"

"I will try."

"But," said Katherine "if he should be awake—here—take this—defend



"I AM ILDA BAROSKY!"

yourself—but get that pardon at any cost," and she handed her the revolver.

No sound broke the silence save the hard breathing of the two women.

Caroline went softly to the door, opened it, and disappeared in the hall within. Katherine ran to her husband's greatcoat and secured another revolver. Then she waited.

Another moment and the girl entered the room.

"Have you succeeded," asked Katherine with feverish anxiety.

"Ay, madame, but you have failed."

"Failed!" gasped Katherine.

"Yes, the pardons you have in your bosom for Alexis Nazimoff and Ivan Barosky are false papers."

With a cry of rage, Katherine tore open the bosom of her dress and pulled forth the envelope. Taking out the pardons she exclaimed: "No, they are genuine. See the great seal," and she pointed to the paper.

The girl grasped the document with a grip of iron. "Yes, they are genuine, thank God."

"Yes, yes! give them to me now," said Katherine.

"Never," shouted the girl in a loud voice. "These pardons that make Alexis Nazimoff and Ivan Barosky free are mine!"

"What do you mean?" screamed Katherine. "Give them to me, I say," and drawing her revolver she sprang for the girl.

"Never!" was the reply, as Caroline struck the hand that held the weapon a second before it was fired.

One pistol shot.

There was a yell—a crash as the stockade quivered with the shock as the exiles rushed through the gates, and with hoarse cries bounded forward to the house and burst in the door.

"Fire!"

Karsicheff gave the command, but

no sound followed. The act of the girl had rendered the guns useless.

"Hold!"

The courier rushed into the room. "What has happened?" he cried.

Caroline Cobb sprang before him. "A plot to murder these prisoners in cold blood has been thwarted," she exclaimed. "These men—Alexis Nazimoff and Ivan Barosky—have been pardoned by the czar. Their pardons are here," and she waved the papers high above her head.

Katherine sprang at her, but recoiled at the cocked revolver leveled at her head. "Woman, devil, serpent, spy," she screamed, "who are you?"

Tearing off the blonde wig which had so effectually disguised her, the girl with flashing eyes confronted the maddened woman as she exclaimed: "I am Ilda Barosky! and the courier has my pardon! I too am free!"

A great cheer went up from the exiles, while the soldiers looked on in helpless wonderment. As the cheer died away there came to the ears of all the sound of galloping horses, the jingle of sleigh bells, and a moment later the voice of Septimus Cobb, who burst through the crowd with a paper held in his hand:

"It is here, colonel," he said. "I have kept my word!"

"Down with them all!" yelled Karsicheff in a very paroxysm of baffled rage.

Nicholas had come in, in his convict garb.

"Stop!" commanded the courier in a loud voice as he glanced over the paper handed to him by Cobb. "Constantine Karsicheff you are my prisoner. Here is the order of the governor dismissing you in disgrace, and ordering you to be sent as a common criminal with the first convoy going to the mines of Kara."

At this moment cries of "Help! help!" were heard from the room where Olga had been confined. Ivan sprang up and with one mighty effort burst in the door, and Olga was in his arms.

There is no need to dwell further on the scenes which followed. Retribution had at last overtaken the Karsicheffs and a week later they were on their way to the mines.

About three months after the events we have just described a great ocean steamer was leaving Hamburg bound for New York. As the mighty vessel cleared the Elbe a groupe of passengers standing on deck turned their faces to the east—in the direction of Russia. They looked for a moment and then turned their eyes toward the west.

They were our friends, Alexis and Ilda, Ivan and Olga, and Gen. Cobb, the proud and happy husband of a titled wife, who stood smiling and happy by his side. They were silent for the time, for the thoughts of all of them were of the scenes in which they had borne a part in the past. They were going to a new home beyond the broad Atlantic, and as the steamer turned her stem to the west, and they saw the glorious sun set in resplendent glory on the broad bosom of the waters, it seemed to be an augury of brighter and happier days, that would banish the memory of their hours of sorrow in Darkest Russia.

(The End.)

No Credit in This Puppl.

Miss Harriet Hosmer, the noted American sculptor, was talking at her Watertown residence about celebrities she had known. Of a certain noted New Yorker she said:

"He was an awkward dancer, but he told me once that he had taken dancing lessons in Boston. His teacher was a charming old Frenchman, a true artist; and when he came to leave Boston he said to the old man: 'I am going back to New York now, monsieur, and if there is any favor I can do for you there I shall be only too glad to serve you.'"

"The aged teacher, with an embarrassed smile, replied:

"I will take it as the greatest accommodation, sir, if you will tell me one of whom you learned to dance."